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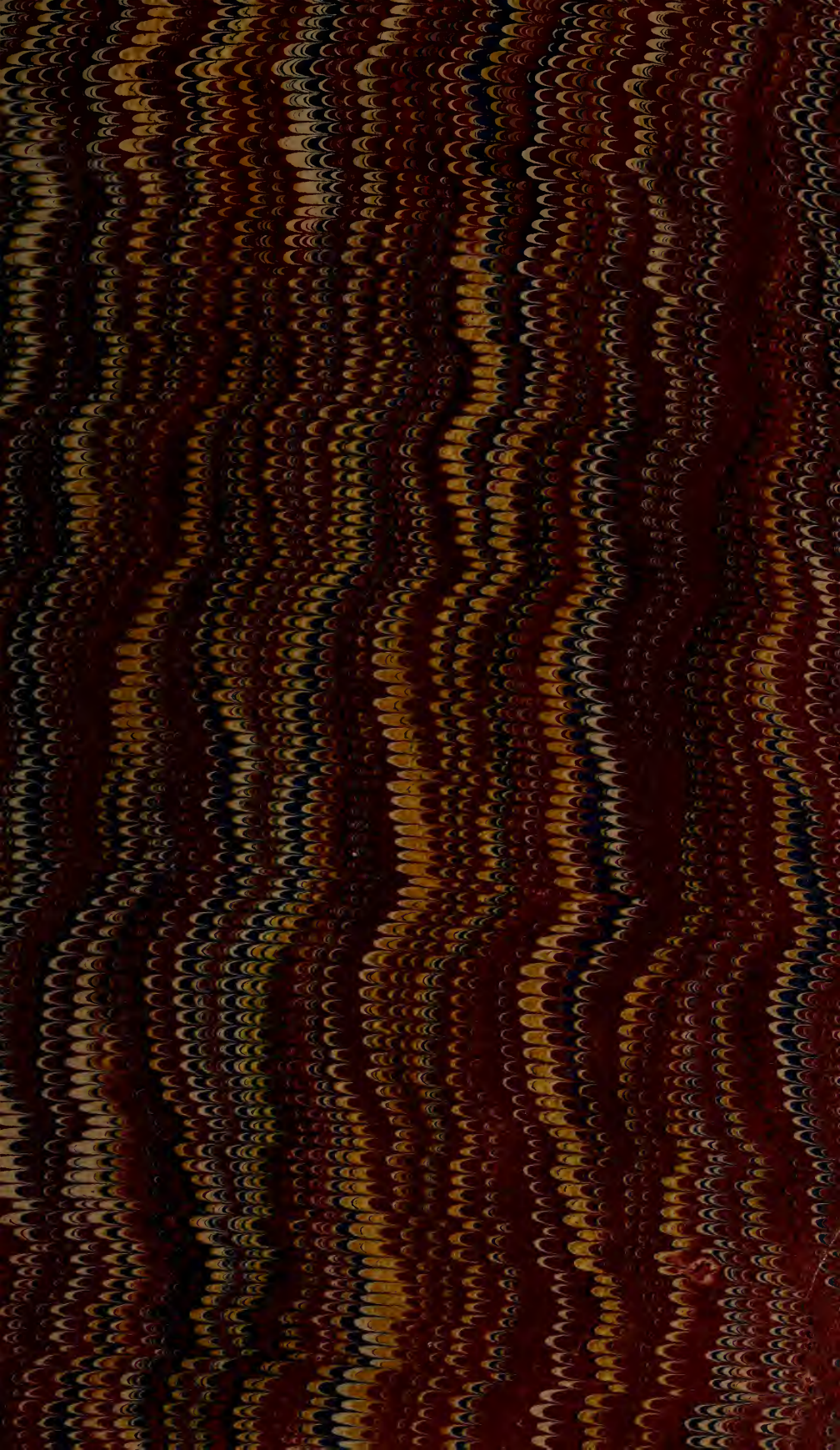
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



Christianity a Permanent Religion.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE

DEDICATION OF THE NEW MEETING HOUSE

FOR THE USE OF

THE CAMBRIDGEPORT PARISH,

OCTOBER 29, 1834.

BY ARTEMAS B. MUZZEY,

Pastor of the Society.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.



Boston:

DUTTON AND WENTWORTH, PRINTERS,

No. 4 Exchange Street.

1834.

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SERMON.

Matthew 24: 35.

HEAVEN AND EARTH SHALL PASS AWAY; BUT MY WORD SHALL NOT
PASS AWAY.

THE consecration of a new temple to the worship of the Father, in the name of his Son Jesus, is a new confirmation of the permanence of our holy faith. Every edifice set apart to this use is another voice declaring to our minds and hearts that, though heaven and earth should pass away, the christian religion will survive. Whether a church be erected by the many, or the few; from the overflowings of opulence, or the hard-earned gatherings of need; whether it be the majestic cathedral, or the most simple Protestant structure; whether it be in honor of Trinity, or Unity; nay, though it were raised that Christ might be preached of envy and strife, we have in those walls a new witness to the immortal nature of true religion. They testify that interests are bound up in this cause, which will outlive all that change, and decay, and desolation can effect. They teach that this subject has a hold on the spirit of man so decided, and so firm, that neither life, nor death, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, shall disturb it.

It will be the aim of this discourse to establish that position ; to shew that, whatever may be the fate of other institutions, the christian religion is destined, through all coming periods, to stand.

I. The first argument I adduce on this subject is found in the existence of that religion at this moment. Is it probable that Christianity will be ever again called to sustain such trials and shocks as it has in past ages ? Will a crisis ever arrive when there shall be so much to be feared by its friends, and so little foundation for hope, as in that dark hour when, our Saviour having just left his disciples, and ascended to Heaven, they gathered all in a single upper room to discuss, with sorrow-stricken hearts, the momentous question, " Shall we now abandon the faith of our departed Master ; or shall we, in the face of scorn, persecution, and death, proclaim it to the world ? " Is it probable that believers in Christ will be more tempted hereafter to renounce their belief, than those were who, in the three first centuries, suffered and died its voluntary martyrs, when by abjuring this doctrine, they might have secured life, possessions, honor, all of this world they had, or could wish ? How soon too did the gospel suffer from the corruptions of a false philosophy. So early as the commencement of the second century, errors from this source were connected with it, which gave rise to dissensions, schisms, and an intolerance that threatened it with destruction in its very infancy. It was not until the reign of Constantine, in the fourth century, that the civil powers ceased to wage war against

the defenceless christians. And when this opposition had ended, there arose another danger hardly less fearful.

The protection of the state proved, in the issue, an evil. By uniting indissolubly political and religious concerns, it occasioned a growing indifference to the spirit, and idolatry of the forms of Christianity. The unwise fostermother had well nigh ruined her adopted one by an unnatural and excessive carefulness. Some may conceive that in those termed "the dark ages," our religion was always secure. The unity of the church, the scrupulous observance of all her requirements, the unbounded guardianship of his Holiness the Pope, what more was needed to uphold the faith? Nothing, I grant, if by this you mean the ceremonies, the name, and the show of religion. But if you speak of inward purity, of true self-denial, of active and social beneficence, of real piety—then do I say that these were in imminent peril from the fifth to the fifteenth centuries. When the laity were forbidden the scriptures, and the clergy were a dishonor to their calling; when persecution was esteemed a duty, and atrocities like that committed on the Jews by Richard I., were publicly sanctioned and abetted, pure religion must have been mournfully rare. And that Christianity should have survived the general decay, and the almost extinction of a true love to God and love to man, as it then did, affords overwhelming evidence of its infinite power and duration.

To come down to a later period, and confine our

view to a single nation, when has Christianity been more vitally endangered than it was in France during the atrocities of her first Revolution? It is usually long after religion has lost its seat in the hearts of a people ere they *avow* their unbelief. The morals of that country must be lamentably degraded, whose rightful representatives boldly affirm, as did the National Assembly, that "death is an eternal sleep"—Christianity must have been driven to her inmost citadel, when a man of genius and influence, could publicly, in contempt of all reverence and decorum, declare, like Voltaire, that "it took twelve men to establish Christianity, but he would show the world that one could destroy it." To an enlightened friend of humanity what more terrific, than the spectacle of philosophers, naturalists, men of art and science, nay, priests themselves, madly denouncing the most holy religion ever embraced by man! But Christianity outrode the storm, and has since been actually indebted to the *sons* of these very monsters of irreligion and atheism, for some of her ablest defenders.

II. We infer next the permanence of our religion from the character of its AUTHOR. It professes to have come from God. It furthermore teaches that the end of all excellence is a resemblance to the Supreme and Eternal One. This is its distinctive feature. But, what are the attributes of that august Being? Among them we number an immaculate purity. And we say at once of this, as of all the divine perfections, that, from its very nature, it must be im-

mortal. For nothing that pertains to God can decay. "His counsel standeth forever. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. The heavens and the earth," as spake the psalmist, "shall perish; but thou remainest; they shall wax old, as doth a garment, but thou art the same; and thy years shall not fail." Now if the Author of Christianity be thus the spring of all immortality, and this religion be designed to raise man to His holiness, to mould him in His moral image, then it must be itself imperishable. For it cannot be that the chief instrument for developing our powers, that which is to redeem us from iniquity, and bring our souls into fellowship with their Creator and everlasting Friend, is itself among things that change and pass away. They who are "born again," must be so by virtue of "an incorruptable seed," and by "the word of God, which cannot but live and abide forever."

III. Christianity, again, is destined to live forever, because it is identified with TRUTH. Jesus Christ called himself "the way, the truth, and the life." He affirmed that His religion would lead man ultimately to "worship the Father in spirit and in truth." And, though he withheld many things from his disciples because they could not then bear them, yet he promised them after his decease, a comforter who should guide them into all truth. The promise was fulfilled. The comforter came;—the revelation is therefore complete. It contains all moral and religious truth. But, it is the essence of truth to be permanent. For what is truth? The reality of things, their necessa-

ry relations to one another. Now these can never change. What was once finite will be so forever. Good will be always good, and evil always evil. No revolution, no accident, no time, or event can alter this law. Neither human nor divine power can make right to be wrong, nor wrong to be right. Error will pass away ; but truth always has been, and will endure forever. This is the sum of philosophy ; and it is the basis of the christian religion. Our holy faith involves the reality of things in our social relations, and between man and his Maker. It teaches us who is the true God, that He is but "One, the Father." It teaches us the only true worship, the "worship of the Father." It unfolds to us our relation to God, that we are his "dear children." It shows us by what means we may secure His favor. It assures us, by the most solemn proofs, that we shall live beyond the grave, and that we must there be "judged according to the deeds done in the body." Now these are all truths, realities ; and the time can never come when one jot, or one tittle of them shall fail.

But we by no means intend to maintain that men's speculations on religious truth will continue always the same. A change is now going forward in certain doctrinal points of belief, which seems to us much more than a new modification of the once accepted Orthodoxy. Indeed, an Institution has been recently established in New England, for the express purpose of perpetuating certain doctrines, specified as essential, but affirmed to be in danger of "subversion," at

a sister Evangelical Seminary. The friends of the ancient system tremble for what they term "the fundamental principles of the gospel." And well they may, if the gospel must stand or fall with those doctrines. But, to us this sign of the times speaks a most cheering language. It furnishes a new evidence of the immortal nature of Christianity. It is the removing of the "hay, wood, and stubble," which were laid in corrupt ages as the foundation of the gospel, and placing "the precious stones" of truth in their stead. We deem it a striking proof of the invincible energy of pure religion, that, when errors have been for a long period accumulating upon it, it rises with an inherent strength, throws off the burden, has "free course, and is glorified" by the process. * Tidings have just reached us that the Inquisition is abolished in Spain. It is a singular fact that where it originated, and its cruel works had been greatest, there it was first abolished.

Analogous to this we find to be the influence of error in science, philosophy, every art and work of man. Truth possesses everywhere a regenerating power. If one age has wandered far in the mists of a false metaphysics, the presumption is that some nearly succeeding one will explode those errors, and when this is done, it furnishes a new testimony to the eternity of truth. The sceptic, by which I mean the universal doubter, regards these reforms in opinion not simply as proofs of man's inability to attain the pure truth at once, but as showing that no such thing as pure truth exists. A sound philosophy

does not so interpret them. Nor should we so esteem the errors of believers in Christ. They are paths by which God leads our race to higher ground, whence truth is more clearly discerned. Hence error in religious opinions and practices has a most important mission on earth. It is useful to the individual ; for it makes him often the wiser and better man. It is of service to the nations and to the passing ages. Not that each error is a permanent teacher ; for each in succession is the effect of transient circumstances. But it is still a beacon-light on the shore of history. And so are all the prejudices and passions of man, whether manifested in the glaring forms of superstition, in the madness of fanaticism, or in the crude conceits of infidelity and scepticism, but as the mighty rivers, the brooks and streamlets; however various their fountain-heads, and unlike their courses, they are all lost at length in the calm ocean of truth.

The position that error is essential to the development of truth seems, at first view, a startling paradox. But, to confirm it, we need only take our station in any of the more corrupt ages of the christian era. Take, for example, the two centuries preceding the Reformation. At this time the reading of the scriptures was prohibited even in England, under pain of receiving no pardon, during the possession of a bible, for any sins whatsoever. In the same parts of Europe, and at the same period, the multitude were actually indebted for much of their knowledge of the contents of that book to *theatrical* representations. The most holy characters in scripture, and

the most solemn transactions there recorded were degraded to impure and farcical exhibitions on the stage. There was a series of plays commencing with one termed "The Creation," and closing with "The General Judgment," in which not only our Saviour, but even the Supreme Being was personated by actors! And what view did the religious portion of the community take of these things? His Holiness, the Pope, granted a pardon of a thousand day's sins to every one who should peaceably attend the whole series! And such representations were encouraged throughout Europe. Could the Church have taken a more effectual method to bring ridicule and contempt on our holy faith? Yet it was an error connected with this very subject, the sale of indulgences, which first moved the indignation of the Reformers, and awoke a spirit that slumbered not until Rome had lost her spiritual ascendancy. In the sixteenth century also, on the eve of the Reformation, there arose a Jesuit, who was elected Cardinal for his devotion to the Papal cause, and chiefly for maintaining the monstrous doctrine, that if the Pope forbid the exercise of virtue, and commanded that of vice, the Roman Church, under the pains and penalties of sin, was bound to abandon virtue for vice. Incredible as such facts appear, they were by no means rare in those days, and go all to prove that the darkest hour of error is that which precedes the dawn of truth. Christianity came out of these fiery trials with new purity, and arrayed still in immortal robes.

IV. Our religion is shewn, moreover, to be permanent, because founded in HOLINESS and VIRTUE. The eloquent apostle, in his just and beautiful delineation of christian goodness, affirms that "Charity never faileth." By this he intends, I conceive, to say, that the religion of Christ, that is, its pure and beneficent spirit is imperishable. And, in addition to his authority, sustained by the supreme authority of his Lord and Master, we have in the very nature of goodness, virtue, or holiness, an earnest of its own immortality. All that is pure in principle, noble in sentiment, or kind in the affections is in harmony with the manifest purposes of our existence. It is so interwoven with all other good that the union cannot be broken. Piety and virtue are to the moral what gravitation is to the natural world. They pervade, regulate, and uphold the whole system. Until you annihilate the subject in which they exist, you cannot destroy them. Vice and impiety are, on the contrary, destructive elements. Reason joins with revelation in attesting that "the wages of sin is death." To disobey conscience is to impair its moral perceptions. To cherish a malevolent feeling is to diminish our ability of loving a neighbor as ourselves. And he, who speaks irreverently of the Author of life, takes the direct course to stifle in his soul the sentiment of piety. This is the law of all goodness; and it is the law of Christianity. "If a man keep my sayings," said our Lord, "he shall never taste death." The widow's mite was with him a precious gift. No right purpose was to be

ever forgotten ; for it came from a fountain of eternal life.

There is a tendency, likewise, in every christian quality to perpetuate itself. A good principle, let us suppose, is established in the breast of some believer. Now that principle will affect the character ; and who does not know, that a pure character is felt by all who observe it. These, again, communicate the impulse to others. When that generation die, they transmit the principle to another. It may for a time slumber in some unnoticed volume ; but it cannot perish. For the soul is always in search for something good. The book will be found and read. The leaven will diffuse itself from mind to mind, and heart to heart, until it becomes a guiding star to the race. Such is christian excellence. It receives through all time, and in all bosoms, fresh supplies of spiritual life, or rather it is life itself, as enduring as the soul it inhabits. As soon may you blot from this outward universe a particle, or a world, as strike from existence a gospel virtue. Be it the smallest seed of pure religion, it belongs to "the word of God." It is therefore "incorruptible, and shall live and abide forever."

V. Another proof of the enduring destiny of Christianity is found in its accordance with the teachings of NATURE. All that the external world reveals to us of the beneficence of its Creator, of his ever watchful Providence, and of his special care over man, is confirmed by our Saviour. He assures us that God, though an impartial moral Governor, is a

mild, merciful Father to our race. Nature had whispered to the soul that it should survive the power of death. "Life and Immortality" was the great theme of the gospel. The capacities of the soul high, glorious, infinite in their tendencies and aspirations, and the unequal distribution of good and evil in this world, give hope of a future retribution of the just. And what is Christianity but a confirmation, in its whole spirit and doctrine, of that blessed hope. But nature, even on the infidel's hypothesis, is an eternal principle. The voice it has lifted up through the endless past, is to be heard, and can never be silenced in the endless future. Who does not feel that we have here a rock for our faith, which, being the foundation of God, shall stand forever? The waves may beat against it, and the rain descend upon it, but they act only in concert with nature, and the religion shall not fall.

This argument is equally conclusive, when applied to the correspondence between Christianity and the nature *within* us. Man, for example, is a rational being. This is the perfection of his character. In proportion as his powers are truly unfolded, he discovers more and more the authority and power of reason. Passion is fitful, and evanescent. The affections are variable; they are often capricious in their objects, and have in themselves little to insure their permanence. But unite them with reason, understanding, judgment, and they become at once steadfast. Now we maintain that pure Christianity is in strict alliance with this kingly at-

tribute. It contains no doctrine at variance with reason. What more rational than these great truths : "The Lord our God is one Lord." He hath sent his Son to be a Saviour and Redeemer of mankind. Repent of thy sins, and they shall be blotted out. "The hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall come forth ; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of condemnation." Here is no principle or precept to shock the intellect, or do violence to the law of conscience. On the contrary, the keeping of such commands brings every faculty of the soul into perfect harmony. And what a delightful harmony it is. Faith and reason, not frowning one on the other, but joined in fellowship. Love to God, that pure sentiment which the whole Universe, in its marks of a boundless benevolence, must always, if justly observed, inspire, made the first great law of Christianity. Love to man, a philanthropy which nature cannot but approve, not coldly commended, but impressed on the very front of revelation. If then the understanding, given us by divine inspiration, be, from its very essence, as well as offices, immortal, how eloquently are we taught that a *rational religion* has the seal of Heaven that it shall never pass away.

VI. Among other circumstances that will perpetuate our faith, we name next, its beneficent influence on man's *temporal* condition.

1. Look first at this influence as manifested in *civil society*. How much has Christianity done for

the political institutions of all nations that have hitherto embraced it? True, our Saviour disclaimed the intention of interfering with the forms of governments, and enjoined peaceable submission to their decrees. He affirmed that "his kingdom was not of this world;" and dissuaded his followers from aspiring to political distinction. But, the indirect influence of his teachings upon civil polity was immense. Where order had been maintained by standing armies, by a multitude of spies, and an odious police, no sooner did the mild spirit of the gospel prevail, than moral restraints were substituted for physical force. He who, in obedience to this faith, regards every one as a brother, will not lift up his hand in anger against him. The ferocity of the vulture will give place to the harmlessness of the dove. A moral elevation is thus given to society, which is felt not only by avowed believers, but by the spiritually indifferent, and even by the professed infidel. Rulers, so far as they are christian men, will be guided by justice and integrity, and remember they are "servants of God." Subjects will submit themselves to the powers that be, as "ordained of God."

Here too will civil freedom be enjoyed, as it can be under no other religion on earth. Christianity teaches men to respect one another as equal and immortal beings. While it leads each to maintain resolutely his own liberty, it inspires a regard for that of his neighbor. Obliterate from any community that sense of accountableness to the All seeing

One which our religion awakens, and you have no possible guard against despotism. Destroy the leaven of christian benevolence, and you destroy all that prevents man from ravaging the possessions, and taking the life of his fellowman. Now if we owe this, all the real security for life, property and freedom we enjoy, to our blessed faith; if that government in which christian principles decline, be it a monarchy or a republic, becomes always a despotism, then the last hope of humanity, a hope which heaven forbid we yet abandon, hangs on the permanence of the christian religion. And, until a people prefer confusion, anarchy, terror and bloodshed, to sitting quietly each beneath his own vine and fig tree, and to sleeping without fear of the yell of the midnight mob, they will never shut up their churches, or bid adieu to the spirit of Christianity.

2. The world are not likely to discard our religion, in the next place, while they value the cause of *charity*. To confine our view to the public charitable institutions that have sprung from the precepts of the New Testament, where shall we find their parallel in heathen countries? In the very life-time of Jesus a benevolent society was already formed. It consisted of his twelve disciples. The traitor Judas, in pleading for the poor, though he did it from a base motive, shewed the current sentiment and practice of the apostles on this subject. And never have the works of kindness disappeared from among christian communities. In every age there has been many a Dorcas. The monastic charities, and those of Prot-

estant lands, Hospitals, Infirmaries for the deaf and the blind, numberless associations to do good, all testify to the merciful spirit of our faith. And the sick and "the poor we shall have always with us." No time will come, no nation be found, in which the gift of alms will cease to be needful, or christians forget to be kind. We have in this fact another pledge that this divine religion, the angel of mercy to our frail and helpless race, will be forever upheld.

3. I have time to allude distinctly to but one more of those benign effects of the gospel, which tend to insure its perpetuity. I refer to its *domestic* influences. Where has the institution of marriage been sustained in its purity save in christian lands? Where else have the relations of home been exalted to their just rank among the means of virtue, peace, and happiness? Where else has woman been elevated to her true rank in society, and at the fireside? The nations of old united in degrading, dishonoring her, and trampling on her rights. The heathen world, and even Judaism, made her the slave instead of the companion of man. At this moment, she is treated in Mahometan and Pagan lands like the brute. The sacred name of mother is there a by-word—the delicate and beautiful relations of daughter and sister are there a reproach. But Christianity delights in exalting woman. Its truths and sentiments are peculiarly congenial to her taste. Its enduring patience and saintly fortitude find in her spirit their native dwelling place. The divine consolations it imparts to the wounded and drooping heart seem the very

element of her being. And shall this precious gift be sometime destroyed from the earth? No. Woman is now too well acquainted with its value to consent ever to part with it. And man, having once respected as he ought, the partner of his lot, will not, in savage selfishness, put forth his hand to suppress it.

We might here adduce many other intellectual and moral advantages that accompany the diffusion of our faith. But it needs volumes to do justice to so vast a subject. We can only say, that the facts and events witnessed throughout christendom, the termination of human sacrifices, and of those multiplied cruelties to man and the inferior creation which stain the page of history, and the introduction in their place of a spiritual worship; the new impulse given to the arts, to science and literature; the ~~abolition~~ *abatement* of War, Slavery, Intemperance, of every political, moral, and social evil; the amelioration of penal codes, and prison discipline, the thousand indirect and nameless benefits we derive from Christianity, are each a token of its unending duration. They give omen of its never-dying energy. They tell us that not only the friend of religion, but the philanthropist, the true patriot, the wise worldling, will cast their vote in its favor.

VII. We observe, next, that our position is sustained by the universal ADAPTATION of Christianity to the wants of mankind. What is most extensively beneficial is most likely to be permanent. But the principles and requirements of our religion are suited to every class and condition of men. It gives gen-

eral precepts, free from minute and perplexing details. In regard to mental culture, it glories indeed in the homage of such intellects as Locke, Milton, and Bacon. It finds a glad abode in the geniuses of our race. But there is no mind so feeble, or uncultivated, that this religion does not meet its comprehension. It has motives that kindle the least spark of virtue. Its consolations wait not on the rich and mighty alone. Nay, Christianity is a fast friend to the poor. Again, it has no burdensome ritual, no tedious ceremonies. The two rites it enjoins are as simple as they are comprehensive and important. Other religions contain much that is local. The Mahometan must perform his pilgrimage to Mecca, or the Prophet assures him "he might as well die a Jew, or a Christian." Transplant the religion of the Hindoo from the waters of the Ganges, and it loses its vitality. Were the worship of China separated from its civil connections, the spring of its power would be broken; for though religion is not there imposed by law, yet the Emperor, who is supreme and undisputed in every act, is in effect the High Priest of the empire. How much of the Mosaic ritual was confined for its observance to Judea. Druidism, if the climate did not produce the oak and the mistletoe, had no soil to support it. You must give the African his lion or tiger for a national fetichè, or his superstition would soon pass away. But the Christian can fulfil the commands of his faith be his person wheresoever it may. His worship is that of the spirit,—its object the Omnipresent One,—his moral-

ity is that love which meets every where a brother. He can receive the baptismal seal no less from a consecrated drop, than in oceans or rivers. And the memory of his Master may be celebrated with equal acceptance beneath polar or tropical skies.

It is evident, indeed, that our Saviour is the only founder of a religion *intended* for universal reception. The leading principle which actuated Moses was strictly national. He would divide the Jews from every neighboring people. Many of their laws were of local application. The great aim of their ritual was to distinguish them from the surrounding world, and show them that God was their Ruler and King, and they His chosen people. Judaism could not, therefore, have become an universal religion. Look, next, at the designs of Zoroaster. He aimed in his whole system of legislation and religion to cooperate with the kingdom of the Medes. And, apart from the despotic governments of Asia, his purposes could not have been effected. Within those limits they were doubtless of much value; but beyond them, of none. Confucius, the celebrated Chinese Reformer, was content with travelling in the narrow circle of his own country, and inculcating there those virtuous sentiments which still characterize his followers. If we turn to the East, or the West, we find no religion, not the Grecian mysteries, not the superstitions of ancient Egypt, not the doctrines of the American, Northern or Southern Aborigines, not the faith of Mohammed—depending, as it does, on the sword for propagation—not one do

we find, except the simple doctrine of Jesus, either intended to be, or capable of being universally prevalent. What a proof is this of the glorious destiny of the gospel. Who can believe that so sublime a system, one that conforms itself to every nation and every capacity, has gone forth to the end of its course? Is there not in this singular flexibility of our religion an evidence that it will journey onward through all ages, and gain new triumphs in its progress?

VIII. This conclusion is much strengthened by the last argument I propose to offer. Christianity will live forever BECAUSE MAN IS A RELIGIOUS BEING. History gives ample support to this assertion. For no people has ever existed, whether savage or civilized, among whom were not traces of the spiritual principle, of a belief in Superior Powers, and in a life to come. The heathen mythologies, the incantations, funeral ceremonies, religious traditions, and expiatory sacrifices prevalent from the remotest antiquity, manifest a conviction that the soul is independent of the body; or, at least, that man is immortal. In the literature of former communities, the earliest productions were the hymn and the solemn litany; and after the decay of nations, we find monuments that recognize the great truths of religion.

There have been numberless varieties, it is true, in the forms and objects of human worship. Now we see an advance from Polytheism to Pantheism. And now, in the decline of society, the objects of

adoration are, within certain limits, fewer, and more disgusting. But, whether it be Phœnicia in its sincerity, or Israel in its wickedness, bowing down to Baal and Ashtaroth, each testifies that man is naturally given to the worship of a God. The Persians once paid homage to fire. The Assyrians, Babylonians, and nearly all the nations of old, adored the celestial bodies. Here the souls of the departed were venerated as gods. There the ocean, time, animals, sometimes loathesome reptiles were deified. Now the blood of bulls and goats, and now that of our fellow mortals has flowed in sacrifice. But, why, you may ask, repeat this revolting catalogue? My friends, revolting as it is, it teaches a most useful lesson. It assures man that the religion, which, in his pride and sinfulness, he sometimes derides, is planted in his inmost soul. The scoffer may cry out "crush the wretch." But, he who is versed in human history, knows that neither scoff, nor menace, neither persuasion, nor violence, has been able, or will be able to exterminate this principle from the world. Religion is a reality. It is all that can satisfy a real want of the spirit. Man seeks it as by instinct. He is born helpless and ignorant. Religion supplies him with knowledge and strength. He is the child of sorrow. Religion is his only effectual comforter. And, as soon will he cease to be man, as lose all traces of his divine origin and heavenly destiny.

Are we told that some do openly deny the God that made them, and mock at the mention of an

hereafter ? This is true, mournfully true. But, it does not disprove that *man*, as a race, is naturally inclined to a belief in spiritual things. There may be individual exceptions. We doubt not there are those who disbelieve in a future state ; though we do doubt whether any man in his sober senses ever disbelieved the existence of a God. But what will these instances prove ? Not certainly that man is by nature a sceptic or an infidel. Some are born maimed, blind, or infirm. Yet no one thinks this a proof that man is naturally maimed, blind, and infirm. Some have little, if any, benevolence, gratitude, or love in their characters. But has not man therefore a moral nature ? Say not then that those unbelievers, who were made so, as almost all are, by a vicious education, or, if not so, by a diseased moral constitution, furnish proof that their race is naturally void of all propensity to faith and worship. Consider rather that every high thought and pure sentiment springs from religion. Know that all genuine philanthropy comes from the same holy source. For to love man, and yet not love that exalted Being who combines man's qualities raised to perfection is wholly inconsistent. So that he is not a perfect man, having all his powers fully developed, in whom the sentiment of religion is not yet developed.

There are those, I am aware, who confide so little in our spiritual destiny, as to entertain fears that religion is waning and wasting from the world. The flames of controversy threaten, they tell us, to con-

sume it, and sectarianism and bigotry are preying on its vital parts. They point us to the Infidelity of the times, and to its bald Atheism, with the assurance that when Christianity is called to meet such open, unblushing, and organized hostility, its days must be numbered. Public opinion, it is thought, both here and abroad, is fast losing its reverence for our sacred faith. Instead of the spacious walls which, in the days of our fathers, welcomed a whole town or village to the same congregation, we have now our puny churches, fit emblems, it is said, of a decaying religion.

But, I do not so regard these events. Controversy, instead of undermining our holy religion, is, I believe, an invaluable means of deepening its foundations. For though some have been wearied by its din, and harm has occasionally attended it, yet there was never a period since the days of the apostles, when religious truth gained as it has within the years just past. I do not say that the ranks of that sect denominated "Liberal Christians," have exceedingly multiplied. But, I do say that liberal sentiments have advanced rapidly, that there has been a decided amendment of the ancient creeds, and a diffusion of new light among every denomination. And we owe this improvement, in no small measure, to the discussions or controversies of the day. They compel men to review their doctrines, "to prove all things," and, as a natural consequence, to "hold fast" that only which can be proved to be "good."

For the spread of Infidelity—we remark that it presents in our own times no new features, and bears

no marks of a greater durability than the Infidelity of France and England in the last century did. Apprehensions were then entertained by many that unbelief would predominate, both here and abroad, over Christian Institutions. But its reign was brief. It was vanquished by the same weapons as it had been in former ages. And so it will ever be until it shall advocate a purer morality and a more sound philosophy. From the ancient scepticism of Lucretius, down though the various modifications and shades of unbelief to this present hour, it has borne on its face uniformly traces of a speedy decay. We believe it will now excite christians to examine anew the evidences of our faith; and to examine them thoroughly leads always to a firm conviction that the religion is true, invincibly true. And the more clearly we perceive its truth, the more earnestly shall we toil in its defence, and the more rational arguments shall we bring to support it. This is all we need. For a reasonable faith is among the certain remedies of unbelief and scepticism. Let irrational creeds and their usual attendants bigotry and intolerance, be abolished, and with them priestly domination, the unrighteous power of Inquisitions, Councils, and self-idolizing churches,—the great rock of Infidel offence,—must dwindle and pass away.

Is it not reasonable, from this tenor of events, to anticipate that the christian religion will never be abolished from the hearts of beings disposed naturally to embrace some form of religion? The sole point to be decided before answering that question is this. Is there any other religion more likely to

prevail and endure than ours? A survey of the other different systems on earth will lead us to conclude that there is no one of them destined to exist forever. The Mohammedan faith, although extensively embraced, and allied to Christianity by what it has borrowed from it, is manifestly losing its hold on the world. It is suited only to an iron age, and to regions of intellectual darkness. But light is dawning on the Moslem race. Two thousand Turkish children are now in the public schools of Constantinople; and the Sultan is compelled to withhold a resistance, at least, to the enlightened and liberal sentiments around him. The recent emancipation of Greece from the Ottoman power gives evidence of the decline of Turkey. Syria is in arms against her despotic ruler. And if Persia were rescued from oppression, the Mussulman must have small hope left of Universal Empire. Little can we imagine that China, or India, by their present superstitious and cruel forms of idolatry, are to give the world a satisfactory religion. As little can we expect this of any other of the Pagan systems. Let us then look to Judaism. But, who can believe that the wandering, homeless Israelite is to ever resume his ancient glory, still less convert Mohammedan, Heathen, and Christian to his superannuated faith? The trust of the nations then must be placed in *Christianity*. And that trust shall not be disappointed. There is that in this doctrine, which at once separates it from all others, and elevates it above them to an enduring sovereignty. "The sceptre shall depart from Judah." It shall fall from the nerveless hand of a Bramah, a

Boodh, and a Mohammed ; but in the hand of JESUS it shall abide forever.

Where else, save in the gospel, can we find a spiritual and expansive power able to give permanent peace to the soul? In that we do find it. What cheering views of Providence does this faith continually disclose. It comes to man, a weak and despondent being, and no sooner does he feel its influence, than a god-like energy pervades his spirit. We are surrounded by temptation, and daily sin. Nature gives us no assurance that our sins can be pardoned. But Jesus Christ, the Son of Infinite Mercy, whispers to our hearts, "If thou *wilt*, thou canst be made whole. Repent, and thy sins shall be forgiven." We are filled with boundless desires. The religion of Jesus opens to us the only spring that can assuage this thirst. We have thoughts that mount upward, and wander forth, from world to world, asking that the mysteries of our souls may be solved. The Bible is placed in our hands, and we read the solution. Eternity—eternity, the song of angels and purified spirits, dispels the darkness that surrounds us, and brings order from chaos. It speaks ; and from the silent tomb, where the mourner lays the loved forms of the lost, a voice issues of hope and solace. The bonds, that were riven by death, are re-united. Death—what is it to the true Christian? It *was* the destroyer of his peace ; it *is* a messenger to brighter shores. It *was* "the king of terrors ;" it *is* the hand of love let down to raise ourselves and our friends to a blessed, immortal home. O honored, precious faith ! Before thee temptation

is awed and quelled, and virtue thrives in eternal youth. At thy bidding, trials and sorrows work out our dearest good. Thou art our present portion, and what can we need? Thou art our light through the grave; what more can we ask? Fear not, happy Christian. Nations may sink, like the autumn-falling leaves. Generations may seem but a splendid procession to their parent dust. We, all of earth that was, and is, and shall be, however fair, and richly endowed, may be borne by time's all-engulphing stream to unknown depths. But thy soul, and thy divine religion shall enjoy a perennial youth. Though heaven and earth should pass away, these shall endure.

Let it not be conceived, however, that Christianity, though destined to this glorious consummation, will prevail independent of human exertions. The prophecy of its Founder, like all the great purposes of God, requires means and agents to accomplish it. We have no pledge that the doctrine will be diffused through miraculous powers. Its truths must be faithfully inculcated; and its forms strictly observed. Christians must exhibit in their lives the spirit of Christ. And they must contribute, not only the aid of an holy example, but their personal influence, their time and substance, to uphold and perpetuate its Institutions. In the present age, peculiar efforts of this latter description are needed.

Brethren, of this Religious Society, I rejoice that, in the erection of this commodious and beautiful edifice, *you* have publicly testified that nothing on your part shall be wanting to give permanence to that

faith you love and honor. It would conform to a natural custom on occasions like the present, to retrace the former history of this Society. But its annals are so brief as to furnish little that need now be repeated, little of which some among you were not authors and partakers. The church, which gave place to this building, was the first erected for the Cambridgeport Parish, and had itself stood but a short term of years. Its location proved inconvenient, and was doubtless a serious obstacle to the growth of the Parish. In an hour of darkness to your spirits, a kind Providence, as I believe you now feel, forbade you ever more to enter it.* With a prompt liberality, and with singular harmony, you at once resolved to set up another altar in the name of the Most High. And that too at the very period when you came under a generous pecuniary obligation to your present pastor.† In concerting and completing this house, you have passed safely through dangers that once threatened your peace, and overcome obstacles on which many societies, when similarly situated, are wrecked. Thanks be to Him, who has crowned our cup with such a succession of blessings—blessings that no one of us dared to anticipate. The Lord requite your zeal and perseverance by the spiritual mercies he shall henceforth send you within this Zion of your hope and affections. May he aid you, with your entrance into this new temple, to

* On the night of Nov. 10, 1833, the Church was partially unroofed by a severe wind, and thus made unfit to be occupied, and unworthy of repair.

†The vote for erecting the present Church was passed Nov. 16, 1833 ; that by which the present pastor was invited to a settlement was taken the 25th of the same month. These concurrent acts of the society in their situation and prospects at that time, manifested a most laudable christian enterprise.

consecrate yourselves afresh, “living temples,” meet abodes for his Holy Spirit. O that you may bear from this place a pure flame that shall burn on your domestic altars, and make this to you, and to those dearest to your hearts, “the house of God, and the gate of Heaven.”

Come then, and with one heart and one voice, let us dedicate these walls to the worship of the One living, and only true God—to the promotion of that sacred truth, and that faith, virtue, and piety which the Son of God came to establish on earth. We dedicate this House to the cause of pure and undefiled religion, to that divine doctrine which accords with the teachings of nature, and with the understanding which God hath breathed into man. May none but the simple, spiritual, and beneficent principles of Christ be ever inculcated from this sacred desk. We consecrate it to that inward sentiment, which satisfies the deep wants of the soul, which awakens the sinner to eternal life, and is suited to all regions and times. We set it solemnly apart to the honor of that Saviour, who is “the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.” We dedicate it to the sanctifying influences of God’s blessed spirit. Here may they descend in plenteous showers of light, wisdom and grace. Let those truths, which are sealed with immortality, be here preached with a godly sincerity, in demonstration of the spirit and of power. May many souls commence here an inward praise, that shall continue when time is no more. Here may the baptismal seal be affixed by many a parent’s love. Around this table numbers, we trust,

through all coming years, shall gather, to attest their love of Him who shed his blood to redeem them from sin. From yonder seats may the melody of devout hearts ever ascend, and spirits be thereby attuned for the celestial choir.

We assemble, my brethren and people, this day in cheerfulness and hope. We were "glad when it was said unto us, let us go unto the House of the Lord." But, if there are pleasing, so also are there sad images clustering round this season and service. How few of us can anticipate being witnesses of the decay and dissolution of these walls. Soon must we exchange these places for those of the great congregation that slumber in the dust. Other forms shall soon fill these seats, and other voices echo along these walls. I have called these sad images. Yet why should I? For, though these loved worshippers are all but "strangers and pilgrims on the earth;" and though the lips that now address you, must ere long be hushed in death, yet the truths they pronounce can never die. It is an animating, glorious thought,—and let these walls reverberate the strain—the religion to be here set forth shall never "pass away." It shall guide our spirits to a fellowship in the heavens with these now living friends, and with the redeemed of all periods, nations, and tongues. It shall survive the decay of this, and of all earthly temples. It shall smile on the ruins of empires, the birth and extinction of successive errors, the subjection of every impure and mortal object; and at length be re-united with, and swallowed up in that "God, who shall be all in all."

ORDER OF SERVICES

—at the—

DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH

Erected by the Society under the Pastoral care of the

REV. ARTEMAS B. MUZZEY,

IN CAMBRIDGEPORT.

OCTOBER 29, 1834.

I.—ANTHEM.

How lovely are thy dwellings, O Lord of hosts. My soul doth long to enter thy courts. Blessed are they who dwell in thy house, for they shall always praise Thee. Amen.

II.—INTRODUCTORY PRAYER,

By the Rev. T. B. Gannett, former Pastor of the Society.

III.—SELECTIONS FROM SCRIPTURE,

By Rev. William Newell.

IV.—ORIGINAL HYMN,

By Mr. George Livermore, a Member of the Society.

Come, Thou, our Father, God Supreme,
And deign to fix thy dwelling here ;
Come, and with holy radiance beam,
And in these earthly courts appear.

Here may we feel a holy thrill,
 When God and Christ, in love are taught ;
 Here bid all earthly cares be still,
 And heavenly truth fill every thought.

Here may the saint come up with awe,
 And bow in prayer to Thee alone ;
 Here may the sinner learn thy law,
 Forsake his sins, and Jesus own.

The house of God ! O may it prove
 The gate of heaven, to all who here
 Shall come to celebrate thy love,
 To hear thy word, and learn thy fear.

And when this temple shall decay,
 And we, who worship, faint and die,
 Grant us one long, eternal day
 Of worship in thy house on high.

V.—DEDICATORY PRAYER,

By Rev. C. Francis, of Watertown.

VI.—HYMN,

By Charles Sprague, Esq.

God of wisdom, God of might,
 Father ! dearest name of all,
 Bow thy throne and bless our rite ;
 'Tis thy children on Thee call.
 Glorious ONE ! look down from heaven,
 Warm each heart and wake each vow,
 Unto Thee this House is given,
 With thy presence fill it now.

Fill it now ! on every soul
 Shed the incense of thy grace,
 While our anthem echoes roll
 Round the consecrated place ;

While thy holy page we read,
 While the prayers thou lov'st ascend,
 While thy cause thy servants plead,—
 Fill this House, our God, our Friend.

Fill it now—O fill it long !
 So when death shall call us home,
 Still to Thee, in many a throng,
 May our children's children come.
 Bless them, Father, long and late,
 Blot their sins, their sorrows dry ;
 Make this place to them a gate,
 Leading to thy courts on high.

There, when time shall be no more,
 When the feuds of earth are past,
 May the tribes of every shore
 Congregate in peace at last.
 Then to Thee, thou ONE all-wise,
 Shall the gather'd million sing,
 Till the arches of the skies
 With their hallelujahs ring.

VII.—SERMON,

By the Pastor of the Society.

VIII.—ANTHEM.

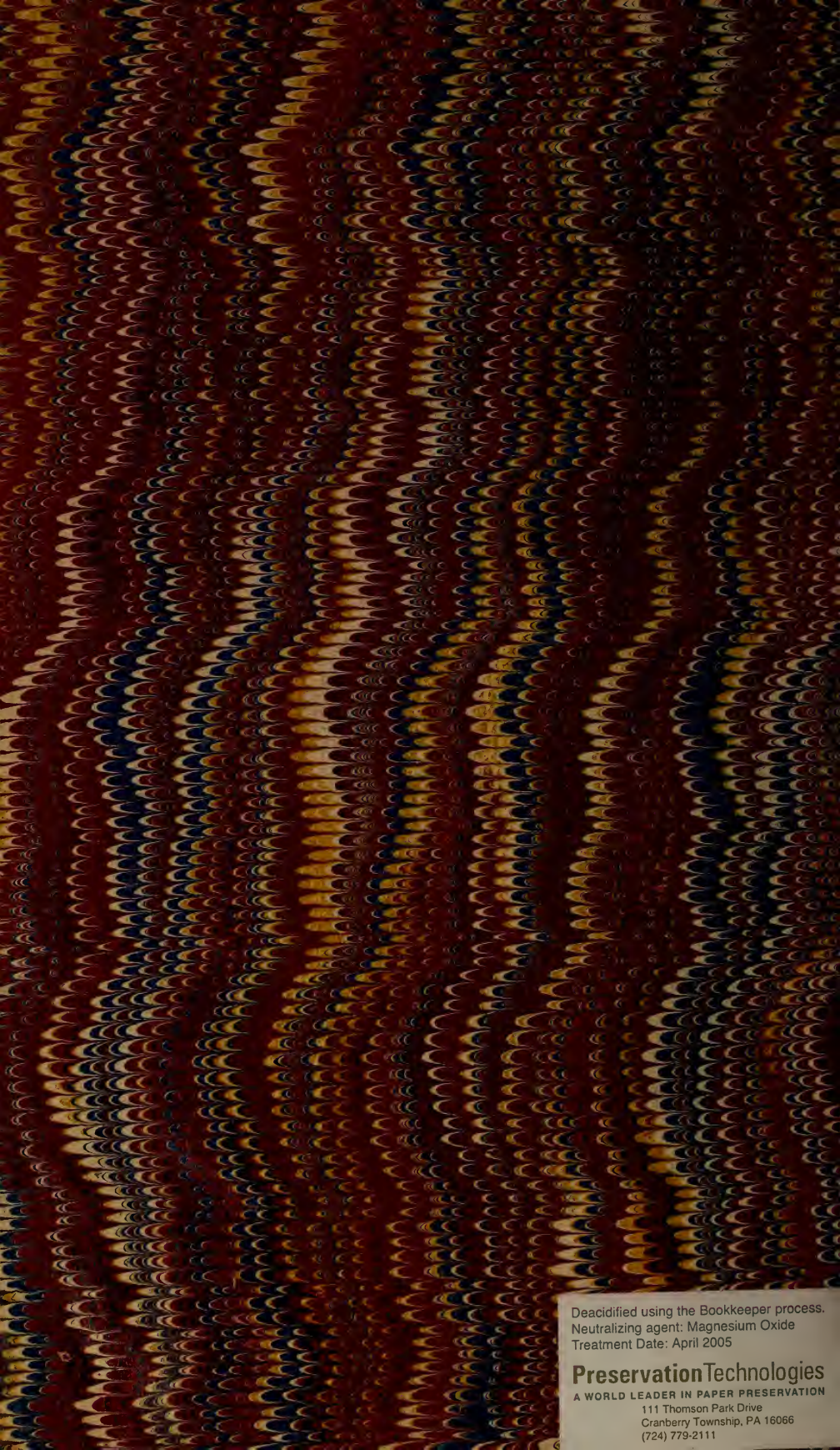
And will the great eternal God
 On earth establish his abode :—
 And will he from his radiant throne
 Avow our temples as his own ?
 These walls we to thy honor raise,
 Long may they echo to thy praise ;
 And thou, descending, fill the place
 With choicest tokens of thy grace.
 Here let the great Redeemer reign,
 With all the glories of his train ;
 Whilst power divine his word attends,
 To conquer foes, and cheer his friends.

Great King of Glory, come,
And with thy favor crown
This temple as thy dome,
This people as thy own. Amen.

IX.—CONCLUDING PRAYER.

By Rev. George Ripley, of Boston.

X.—BENEDICTION.



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